

IRISH WRITING

THE MAGAZINE OF
CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE



Edited by

DAVID MARCUS

and

TERENCE SMITH



NUMBER FIVE

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('A Storyteller's Childhood' is published in Eire by Browne & Nolan Ltd.).

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FOREWORD



Our first Literary Award has been won by Valentine Clery for his story "She is Far from the Land," which appears in this issue. Mr. Clery's story stood out above all others submitted—mainly, perhaps, for his combination of original subject-matter with an assured style. Here is a writer who, it would seem, has studied Ernest Hemingway to good effect and not in the manner of some imitators who reproduce only the more aggressive aspects of the American writer's style. Thus, we find in this story a directness, soldierly perhaps, but not facile or unaware—an *impact* created by the writer's confidence in his alert senses. In matter as in manner the story has largeness and an element of romance that in no way compromises, heightens rather, the author's intention to depict war at its worst.

Several good stories were submitted for the Award, many of the writers showing undeniable talent but keeping too much to well-trodden ground. There were, however, some interesting exceptions and these will appear later. In all over one hundred stories were entered. The general level reached was good and certainly would suggest that there is no lack of literary effort in Ireland today.

THE EDITORS.

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Evening Star

EVERY time Master Kennedy and his wife passed the gates of Carewscourt House, and the lovely little willow-pond beside it and the cottage beside the pond they said that when he retired they would buy that cottage. The very summer he ceased teaching he did buy it. He was sad that his wife had not lived to share it with him but he was as happy, otherwise, as Robinson Crusoe, with his cat and his few books, and his memories. He would sit at the door every day, dreamily watching the tresses of the willows touch the water-lilies, thinking of little but his youth, and his teaching days, and his last end, saluting everyone who passed the road, as proud as if he were Lord Carew himself.

Around Christmas he fell ill with a cold that nearly finished him, and it was then that he first noticed the great blobs of damp on the walls; but he did not pay much attention until February when his foot went through the floor of the front room and his bootsole came up green with mildew. He at once took his stick, put on his hat, and sought out Paddy Markham, the local mason, whom he found plastering the base of the wall of Neville's pub in the Main Street, and he put the case to him. The mason had the trowel in one hand and the hawk in the other, and as he listened he kept mixing the bit of mortar with the point of the trowel. In the end he chucked the trowel into the mortar and looked up at the Master.

'If 'twas anywan else but yourself, Masther, I'd make a week's work out of it. But you taught my kids and you taught 'em well, and I wouldn't do it to you. And, anyway, to tell you the honest truth I've been tinkerin' with that ould cottage for the last forty years and I'm fed up with it. I've made people spend hundreds of pounds on that cottage trying to get the damp out of it and,' he said triumphantly, 'it's as soppin' as if they never spent a penny on it. I put damp-courses on it. I waterproofed it. I plastered it with pluvex and supex and pudlos and cudlos and dudlos and the divil knows whatos and you might as well be thryin' to plaster up th'Atlantic Ocean. Mind you,' the mason went on, while the Master stared gloomily at his enthusiastic face, 'there's noth-

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ing at all wrong with the little house. It's a nate little house. The house is all right. 'Tis well built and solid as the Rock o' Gibraltar. There's only wan thing wrong with the house.'

'And what the devil is that?'

'Tis the pond that you have in front of the house that's seeping onderneath the foundations. There'll be days, Masther, when you could take up a floor-board in the front parlour and find a lake onderneath the house.'

'Oh, well, in that case,' cried the Master. 'That's easily settled. We'll get rid of the pond.'

'How?'

The Master considered the beaming face of the mason.

'Where does the water in that pond come from?' he asked.

The mason drew back and looked sideways at him.

'It comes in a stream from the big lake in front of Carews-court House, where else?'

'I know that, but where does the water in the lake come from in the first place?'

The mason laughed.

'I'm surprised at you, Masther. I thought you knew everything about the town of Rathvilly. Didn't you write articles for the paper about it! Don't you know the ould gulley with the wooden dam beside Beechmount cross-roads. It comes through a channel from the River Villy that the Carews cut there hundreds of years ago.'

The Master touched his beard.

'And flows into my pond, and flows out of my pond in front of all the cottages. . .'

He stopped. In front of him he saw a small boy throwing stones into the little walled river that runs down the middle of the Main Street of Rathvilly. Th child stood on the far pavement, which is three steps above the street, on that side.

'Then that stream must be seeping under every shop along this side of the street, and under every cabin back the road, as well as under my cottage?'

'To be sure it does,' the mason agreed in the utmost satisfaction.

'Then that settles the matter. The County Council must wall up the dam at Beechmount cross-roads.'

The mason's mouth fell open.

'O-o-oh, that's a different story all-together! Stop the shtream? Sure if you shtopped the shtream I wouldn't have a shtroke of work to do in the town of Rathvilly!'

But the Master was not listening to him. He was stamping down the street, up the hill, past the last line of cabins,

each with its own little wooden bridge, back to his cottage and his pond. He sat down and wrote a furious letter to the Secretary of the County Council demanding that the dam at Beechmount be permanently closed. Within a week he had the town turned upside down.

'But sure, my dear Michael,' laughed the County Engineer, Corny Cosgrave, when he called on the Master (who had taught him his first pothooks in the National School and was now grey-bearded enough to be his grandfather), if we did what you want us to do we'd dry up the blooming lake in Carewscourt.' (With a jerk of his head to the demesne wall behind them.)

'And why not, Cornelius?' the Master asked calmly.

'But, good Lord! It's their lake!'

'Is that a fact, Cornelius? And who gave them the right, Cornelius, to deflect the water to make the lake? Did they ask permission of the town of Rathvilly to make the lake? Did they get permission from the County Council to make the lake?'

'You know danged well,' cried Corney testily, 'that there was no such a thing as asking permission in those days. If there was even such a thing as a County Council in those days they *were* the County Council, them and all their likes. . .'

'They,' corrected the Master.

' . . . and as for asking permission from the town, what are you talking about, sure they made the town, they owned the bloody town.'

'And do they still own us, Cornelius?' asked the Master, combing his beard and glaring at his pupil like Moses at a backsliding Israelite. 'Is this all our much-vaunted liberty has brought us?'

Corney groaned and made a face.

'Yes, I know, I know, I know but hang it all. . .'

'You,' persisted the Master, in his slow biblical voice, 'were one of the first young men in this county to take up arms for the independence of your country. You fought. . .'

'Look, Master, for God's sake will yeh leave politics out of this? You'd drag politics into the sale of a wheel-barrow. This question is not a political question, it is a legal question.'

'And is the law of Ireland,' growled the Master, 'for the Saxons or is it for me?'

'The law,' said Cornelius, throwing his arms as wide as possible as if to throw the whole matter as far away from himself as possible, 'the law is for everybody, rich and poor, gentle and simple, Christian and Jew, young and old, male and female, without the slightest distinction of class or creed.'

The Master looked quizzically at his pupil and as if he had

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a cane behind his back and was asking, 'Tell me what is the capital of Arakan?' he said,

'Kindly tell me, Cornelius, what is the law in this matter.'

'That will be for the courts to decide.'

The Master let such a roar out of him that his cat opened one eye.

'So that,' he roared, 'is your decision? That I must go behind the County Council to the courts?'

Corney saw that he had fallen into a trap.

'Now, now, don't take me up on a word. How do I know what the Council will decide to do?'

'You know damn well what you've decided to recommend to them.'

Corney took the Master by the arm and smiled lovingly at him.

'Listen to me, Master Kennedy.' (But the old man did not fail to notice the change from 'Michael' to 'Master' and from 'Master' to 'Master Kennedy' together with the increasing amiability.) 'You and me were old campaigners together. You were a Fenian, and the son of a Fenian, and you were the first man to open my eyes to the true facts of the National Question. Oh, begob, the way you taught Irish history was a marvel! A positive marvel! And you know that I'm as sound an Irishman as you'll get in the four quarters of Ireland, and you know that, and I know that, and the two of us understand one another's lingo, but what you forget, and a lot of other people forget, and I say this, now, with the greatest respect for you and in the highest possible regard, is that those days are a thing o' the past. The people of Ireland can't be going back over old sores for ever and ever. There are such things, you know, as what they call *fate accomplée*.' He slapped the Master on the shoulder as if it were he who was the teacher and the Master the pupil, and laughed jovially. 'I often heard of people wanting to turn back the clock but what you're trying to do is to turn back a blooming river!'

The Master looked at him sourly.

'There was a grand politician lost in you. You have all the ould tags. And kindly tell me this. Why shouldn't we put back the clock? It sometimes goes a bit fast. And kindly tell me another thing. Why shouldn't we dam up a river if we want to? We were able to harness the River Shannon to make a hydro-electric scheme. Aren't you able to dam a little stream no bigger than a dog's piddle for the sake of the health of your own town?'

'My dear sir, give me one man with a shovel and I'll do it for you in five minutes.'

'Then why don't you do it?'

'Because certain people have certain rights, that's why.'

'It's not by any chance because certain people are afraid of certain people, is that why?'

Corney went pink and seized his hat.

'I will make my report directly to the County Council,' he said coldly. He paused at the door. 'You were always a cantankerous ould bastard.'

'And you,' the Master shouted after him, 'never got enough of the stick on your behind.'

The clang of the motor-car door and the bang of the cottage door were simultaneous.

That was more or less the way the thing was argued in the town every time the question cropped up. If a child wet his feet in the stream it was enough to start it all over again. If a twinge of rheumatism caught some old lad who had never done a stroke of work in his life he would curse the stream, and blame the Carews, and strike an attitude and say, 'Is it for this we bled and died?' But there were people who liked the stream, especially those who lived above it. One old ex-soldier remembered that he had met an Englishman in Burma who said, 'Rathvilly? Isn't that the town where the stream runs down the middle of the Main Street?' Waving his glass in the pub this traveller cried, 'And are we to deshtroy a shtrame that have us made famous all over the world?'

There was something else that the Master failed to reckon with. The Carews had done a lot of little kindnesses in the town of Rathvilly. And if they had not been the best of landlords in the old days they had not been the worst of landlords either. And they bred horses. Besides there was not a shopkeeper in town with whom they did not deal and to whom they did not owe money, which meant that whenever the Carews got a chance they made the shopkeepers hop, and as everybody knows that is the only way to treat shopkeepers or they would walk on you. They gave employment on the demesne. They found jobs for others in the big houses of the county. They gave cheap firewood to the poor. The result was that the next thing Master Kennedy heard from the County Council was a letter saying that 'in view of the enclosed document no action can be taken in the matter.' The 'enclosed document' was A Grand Petition, signed by two hundred and fifty of Rathvilly's inhabitants, pleading most eloquently for the preservation of the stream, and ending up with a quotation from 'The Deserted Village.'

When the old man read this Petition he nearly took leave

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of his senses. He knew well what pressure lay behind every name on the list, even what threats. The first name on it was the mason's. Then came every one of the Carewscourt workers. The last two names, alone, could not have been extracted willingly. They were two old women who, to his knowledge, had been dead and buried for nine months. 'Do the Carews think,' he snorted, 'that they're running a General Election?'

For another thing he was exasperated by the way people who had signed the Petition started to come up to him where he would be standing by his door watching the greening willow-branches touch the ruffled pond, and say something like:—

'I suppose I needn't tell you, Mashther, I never signed that ould Petition.'

'But your name is signed to it in black and white.'

'Ach, phwat signify that? All I told 'em was to throw me name on th' ould paper if it gave 'em any satisfaction. Sure, Mashther, I'm a *hundered percent* with you for gettin' rid of that ould stream.'

'I understand,' the Master would say. But in his heart he would be saying, 'You slave—you miserable slave.' He almost began to admire the Carews. Outnumbered five hundred to one they could still keep this rabble under their heels.

The thing that infuriated him most of all was the talk he had to listen to from the Carewscourt church-parade when it passed his cottage every Sunday morning; the Eustaces who were Carew's in-laws, and the Black Brodricks who were his cousins, and the Red Brodricks who were related to his wife, and all the rest of his connections male and female. Even though he would shut the door and the windows he would hear their deliberately piercing voices say things like 'The impudence!' or 'Who is this person?' On these mornings it was the blessing of God that he had not a shotgun in the house.

One Monday morning he could stand it no longer. He went into Limerick city to a solicitor, a gentleman of the old school, long accustomed to country litigation and long sick of it. He listened to the Master's story and then said, sadly:—

'I'm afraid, Mr. Kennedy, you have a case. I'm sorry to say I think you have a case.'

'Afraid? Sorry?'

'Yes. Because it means that you'll go ahead with it. And I wish you wouldn't. I know every one of the Carews, and they're a determined lot of people. If you beat them in the lower courts they'll take you up to the Four Courts and they

won't stop until they ruin you. And if you beat them there they won't stop until they run you out of the town. They'll fight you to the last ditch, and beyond it. And, mind you, Mr. Kennedy, I don't blame them.'

'That's queer kind of talk to be going on with to your own client. Are you on their side too?'

The Master rose in his chair.

'Sit down, sit down. And I refuse to take offence at what you've said. I'm not on their side but I can put myself in their position. And if you could do the same thing you'd see that if you were Lord Carew, and if somebody tried to take away from you something that you and your people had owned for going on two-hundred years—something that you'd looked at every day of your life, ever since you were a boy, something that all your boyhood memories were wrapped up in, and your father's and your mother's before you, and back behind them for the seven generations—something you were very fond of, Mr. Kennedy—you'd fight that man down to the last brass farthing you possessed. Wouldn't you? Honestly now, wouldn't you?'

The Master scattered the air with his hands.

'There's no sense nor meaning to this kind of talk. I'm not interested in these hypotheses. I'm not Lord Carew, and I don't want to be Lord Carew, and I know nothing about Lord Carew, but if I was Lord Carew and I wanted to make a lake in front of my house I hope I'd do it some other way than by draining my dirty water past every cottage between my front gate and the gable-wall of the chapel.' The old man went white with anger; he leaned half-way over the desk. 'If I wanted to make a lake this minute in front of my house would I be allowed to run away with half the river to do it? They stole the river,' he shouted. 'They stole the river, and if there's justice in the country they should be made give it back to the people that owns it. Lord Carew! How could I be. . . .' He laughed derisively. 'Me, Lord Carew? Do you know,' he groaned out hatefully, 'what the Carews did in 1798? Do you know that. . . .'

The solicitor listened wearily. When the old man sank back, exhausted and trembling, he said,

'Very well. You evidently feel strongly about this. And if your mind is made up, your mind is made up. But I warn you that it's going to leave a blister on you to the end of your days. It would be far cheaper for you to leave the cottage altogether.'

'I will not leave the cottage. I love the cottage. Ever since

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my wife, God rest her, saw that cottage twenty-five years ago she wanted me to have that cottage. I put the best part of my life's savings into that cottage.'

'All right. So be it. But you must go to another solicitor. I'll help no man to ruin himself.'

The Master paused at the door-handle.

'Why have I a case?'

'If the water is damaging your property somebody must be liable.'

'Good.'

'Mind you it may not be Carew. It may be the Borough Council.'

'It is Carew. And I'll get him.'

'But Carew will get at the Council, you know.'

'How?'

The solicitor parted the air gently with his hands. The gesture reminded the old teacher of the priest at Mass saying *Dominus Vobiscum*, and all the way back in the train he kept murmuring to the wet, wheeling fields, *Dominus vobiscum*. The words remained with him for days, during which he spent hours and hours, working late into the night writing appealing letters to everybody of position whom he had ever even slightly known. During those nights when he would hear nothing but the soft swish of the willow outside, or an occasional car driving fast through the town, it seemed to him that, in some way, his desire to go on living in his cottage was linked with his wife's desire to possess it, and that the words *Dominus Vobiscum* were words of encouragement from her to him. He would take a new sheet, then, and write another long, appealing and angry letter, to a member of the Council, or a priest; he even wrote to the Bishop and to the President of Eire; the morning would find him again, sitting by the littered table, bleary and collarless, sipping a cold glass of milk by a cold hearth, shivering to hear the willow creeping over the water of the pool. To not one of these letters did he ever receive a reply.

The lawyers meanwhile enjoyed themselves. His new solicitor quoted against the Council some antiquated statute from the reign of King John about public waterways; the Council's solicitor countered that the stream was Carew's private property; his solicitor quoted this against Carew; but Carew's solicitor replied that once the stream left the demesne it became the public property of the people of Rathvilly. This made the whole thing flare up again in the pubs where the hobbys argued and argued, and others dug into the private lives of the Carews and the Eustaces and the Brodricks for

the seven generations, and there were fights between the pros and the antis, and talk of making the stream an issue at the next general election. In all this the only sweet whisper that came to the Master was that Carew's health was poorly and his pocket never lighter, and though he had often glanced at him in the town or walking the road with his dogs he now began, for the first time, to peer carefully at him through his cottage-curtain and take a vicious note of the droop of his back and the colour of his long face that was yellow and hollow as an old spoon. But still the stream tinkled and the willow whispered and it seemed to him that when Carew passed his cottage he smiled crookedly.

Then, suddenly, one afternoon, in late April, the words *Dominus Vobiscum* came to the Master with a new meaning. As he murmured the words he looked out of his window and saw a rainbow that seemed to leap from his pond across the sky to the spire on the Chapel Hill. He seized his hat and stick and stumped down into the town, and up Chapel Hill to the presbytery. He climbed the long steps one by one, and rang the bell and asked for the Monsignor. The maid put him to wait in the smaller side-parlour. As he stood and looked through the lace curtains at the first lighted windows in the smoky little town he saw something he had not noticed before—a big motor-car at the presbytery gate. It was the Carewscourt car.

Across the hall he became aware of a murmur of voices and the sound of somebody laughing. He opened the door. It was the delicate laugh of the Monsignor, and he could imagine the dainty little figure, the white hair, the rosy cheeks, the jigging hand, and the touches of red in vest and biretta. He felt his heart thrusting against his breast bones and the blood pumped up under his eyes. He crossed the hall and flung open the door. There was Carew, big, sallow, long-faced but smiling and the Monsignor opposite him, beaming as he pointed to the big Ordnance map spread on the plush-covered table between them. The Master lashed the table with his stick so that the papers flew.

'I knew it,' the old man whispered, glaring from an astonished face to the other. 'For forty-five long years,' he gasped, 'I've taught in this town, and my poor wife with me I served you,' he pointed his trembling stick at the Monsignor 'since I was a boy serving Mass at the altar, and now I find you conspiring against me with the gentry.'

The Monsignor had risen, fluttering his two palms in the air, begging him to 'Be silent!'

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'I hoped,' the Master sobbed, 'I hoped to find the Church on my side and on the side of my poor wife. But the Church is against us! The Church is. . .'

He collapsed.

Painfully they helped him out, and down the long steps, and they bundled him into Carew's car. Nobody saw them. The cries of the children at play did not pause. Carew drove him home.

On the way, Carew remembered that the old chap lived alone and instead of pausing at the cottage he turned into the avenue and up to his own front steps where the butler, hearing him come, already waited to open the door of the car. By that time the Master had recovered, and when he looked up and saw the butler, an old pupil of his own, one Tim Twomey, and saw where he was, he scrambled out in angry disdain.

'You'd better have a brandy, Mr. Kennedy,' Carew suggested and nodded to Twomey.

'I want nothing from you but the one thing, and that,' the Master began haughtily, and stopped.

Behind Carew's tweed hat he saw the lake. It was an oblong sheet of water, enclosed by a low granite coping. The sun, setting directly behind it, burned that smooth perspective, falling fast between a rosy scallop of low clouds and the flowing hills of Villy that were hard as jewels in the cold April air. This glow of light in the long lake was broken only by a row of cypresses at the farther end whose black plumes plunged into the gleaming pool to spear the light again; and, by two wrestling tritons from whose mouths two fountains rose and crossed and fell with a soft splash, and in whose aureole of spray the sunset made a prism of colour.

Carew watched the old man's eyes for a moment or two. They were a play of admiration, and of anger, and of hate. Then, guessing shrewdly, he said,

'Well, Mr. Kennedy, there's the cause of all the trouble, that you're looking at, I think, for the first time. And, probably, I think, for the last time.'

The Master looked quickly at him, arrested by his tone.

'I mean,' Carew said, with a little crooked smile on his long face, 'the lake is going to be drained.'

'You're closing the dam!' the Master asked, unbelievably, and looked back at the fading brilliance of the water.

'You may as well know. If it gives you any pleasure. I'm selling Carewscourt. I've sold it to a teaching Order of nuns. Good teachers, I believe. Or so the Monsignor tells me. One of the first things they're going to do is to drain the lake. And I'm not much surprised for it's damn near drained me.'

And he began to tell the old teacher how badly it had been constructed, with somebody always having to empty it and mend the bottom, or grout the sides, or repair the plumbing of the fountain, or dredge the channels down through the town.

'The sisters are going to plant a sunken garden in it. Oh, well! They haven't sat here of summer evenings as I have watching for the moon.'

And even as he talked the sun vanished behind the frosty hills and a star shone greenly in the green sky and trembled in the water. The splash of the fountains became more distinct. The hills were dark when Twomey opened the glass doors behind them, and Carew said, turning, 'It'll be a hard frost to-night,' and Twomey stood waiting for his old teacher to take the glass from the salver.

'We use the hall for a dining-room,' Carew explained as Twomey began to light the candles. 'This,' he led the way, taking a silver candelabra in his free hand, 'used to be a dining-room, but . . .'

The Master looked into the long empty room, empty except where the remnant daylight from the bare windows fingered the gilt pipes of an organ at the far end.

'I've emptied damn near every room in the house. I'll sell everything except these books.'

They walked across the hall to the big bookcases. The Master looked into them greedily.

'Mostly Irish books,' said Carew. 'Family history. I'll keep these.'

'And where,' asked the Master, speaking for the first time since he asked who would dam the lake, 'where are you going to live?'

Carew tapped his chest and drained his brandy.

'I haven't long to run. Can I drive you as far as the gates?'

He drove circuitously, around the far end of the lake and halted there for a few seconds to look. The lighted hallway daggered the water.

'You should have seen it on nights when every window in the house was lit.'

'And when would that be?' asked the Master.

'In my father's time we always lit them for the King's birthday. The last time I had the illuminations was the night the Irish Free State was founded.'

He meshed his gears and drove on. At the gates he turned and the Master got out.

'There's somebody in your house,' Carew remarked, seeing the lighted window in the pond and the willow wavering

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lightly under it.

'The old woman who gets my supper. Good night, Lord Carew.'

'Good night, Mr. Kennedy.'

When the car lights had vanished between the gate-pillars the Master walked towards his cottage and stopped dead. From where he stood the window was no longer reflected in the water. In its place he saw the evening star. He stood there, in the dark, looking for a long time at the star, hearing the willow whispering and the stream whispering.

He was startled from his dreaming when, down the line of cabins, beyond his cottage, a door opened and shot out a beam of light, and closed again, and he thought:—

'They'll praise me when they hear the stream is to be stopped, but they won't mean it, and when 'tis gone they'll be sorry after it and blame me for its going. Just as they'll say they're glad to see the end of Carew, and then be wailing over the fire at night at the passing of the gentry.'

He looked back to the star, serene in the water, but as he looked it began to fade, as if clouds were coming across the sky. He watched anxiously. It gleamed again, more brilliantly and more beautifully than before. Then it went out. He watched a long time, standing like a pillar by the pool, except when frost made him shiver. The star did not come back. He went into his cottage and closed the door.

VALENTINE CLERY



She is Far From the Land

AS he stepped out into Basra Road, he could hear the soldier from Kilkenny still drunkenly singing in the back-room of the wineshop. She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps. . . He smiled to himself and, humming the tune, turned and ambled along the sidewalk. The high, fervent sun of Palestine noonday pressed down upon him, transforming the vivid glowing of the wine in his veins to a dragging sleepiness. Be glad when I get back. It'll be nice and cool in the barracks. Have a shut-eye session before that patrol tonight. Hardly worth it though, coming out for a few drinks, risking my neck. Too much damn trouble about. Blasted Yids and Wogs, never quiet. Trouble with the Super, too, if he catches me out in civvies. Oh what the hell, anyway! She is far from the land. . . Better take the short-cut.

He turned off the main-road into a side-street which led towards the police-barracks. The street was silent, and deserted, except for a solitary Arab who squatted by a doorway at the far end. Mesmerising heat-ripples swam upwards from the dusty brown paving-stones.

He continued the song, singing its lyric drowsily under his breath. . . But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps . . . For her heart in his grave is ly. . .

The Arab had suddenly scuttled out of sight. The stubby muzzle of a tommygun poked out from a doorway just ahead. A voice from behind him said quietly:

—Step this way, Sergeant Delaney! Don't make any trouble!

And a hand on his shoulder guided him into the dim hallway of a house.

He tried to grab the automatic from his hip-pocket, but his muscles were drugged with heat and wine. His arms were pulled behind him and the weapon was removed.

Before a blindfold was drawn across his eyes, he caught sight of one of his captors—a typical young Jewish settler, with suntanned face and dark curly hair. Then his wrists were firmly bound together behind his back.

He heard a motor-vehicle turn in from the main-road and

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come slowly down the street. It stopped nearby with its engine running. He was hustled across the pavement and bundled over the tailboard of a truck. Somebody climbed in and sat on the floor beside him, then a door was slammed and the truck bumped into motion.

The truck turned many sharp corners, jostling him from side to side. He tried to keep count, to guess the direction, but it was useless, for the town was a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys. Bloody fool! Made it easy for them. Walked into their blasted hands. These Yids know every policeman in town by sight. The civilian clothes don't fool them. Wonder why they didn't just shoot? Must want a prisoner. God, yes! . . . a hostage for that kid who's due to hang at Acre. Two heavy Army trucks passed, close by. . . Must be on a main road. Blast! Bloody fool! Going out drinking! Be up before the Commissioner about this, if. . . The truck began to bounce violently. . . uncobbled road, must be in the Old Town. . The engine echoed under an archway, then stopped. . A courtyard?

The tailboard was dropped with a crash, and he was lifted out on to his feet, feeling ill, with a dizzy headache, after the rough journey. Hands gripped his elbows and led him across some uneven paving, then half-lifted him up a flight of stone steps and walked him along a corridor, where the footfalls echoed. His shoulder rubbed past a door, he was lifted again and was placed, half-lying, on a mattress with his bound arms supporting him against a pile of blankets.

A chair creaked near him, as somebody sat down. A door was closed, and the sound of footsteps faded, echoing, down the corridor.

He let his throbbing head droop forward on to his chest. Then a voice, speaking English with a slight foreign hesitancy startled him:

—You would like a cigarette, perhaps, sergeant?

—Yes, he answered, I'm gasping for a smoke.

He gripped the loosely-packed cigarette which was placed against his dry lips, and inhaled. It was made with harsh Palestine tobacco.

—Thanks, he said. I was an easy catch, wasn't I?

—Yes, the voice replied. You were being watched all the morning, sergeant.

—Stern Gang or Irgun?

—That, I am not permitted to say. You will know soon, perhaps.

—So will you, my laddo—when Superintendent Barrett comes along to collect me.

—I think your superintendent will find it difficult to collect you.

—Perhaps. . .

Footsteps approached along the corridor outside. The chair creaked as the guard stood up. The door was opened, and somebody else came into the room.

For a moment, there was whispering, then a new voice, with a more cultured, authoritative tone, began to speak:

—Sergeant Delaney, you are at present being held as a hostage by the Liberation Army of Zion. As you may already know, Moshe Kazra, a soldier of Zion, is being held by the authorities at Acre Prison, under sentence of death. If he is released by the authorities, as we shall demand, you will be also set free. If he is executed. . .

The voice paused. Delaney, sensing a shrug, nodded his head slowly in understanding.

—An eye for an eye. . ., he quoted, with a wry smile.

—Exactly, continued the voice. Until a decision is reached, you will be held here as a prisoner-of-war. You will be granted every comfort within reason. Unfortunately, it is necessary for security purposes that your eyes be kept blindfolded, but if you give your word of honour not to interfere with the bandage, your hands will be unbound.

—I give my word.

—I must warn you that a guard, armed with one of your excellent sub-machine guns, will watch you at all times.

He was rolled on to his side, and the cord about his wrists was cut away. As he sat massaging the chafed skin, he heard the door close behind the spokesman, and again he was alone in the room with the guard, who said:

—Your cigarettes have been left in your pocket, sergeant.

—Thanks. Have one?

—No, thank you, but I will light it for you.

—Do, I'm not quite used to being a blind man.

The room was cool, and his head had ceased to throb. He relaxed against the pile of blankets, smoking thoughtfullySo I was right—a hostage. Must be the Irgun crowd, Kazra was one of them. Moshe Kazra. . .the courtroom guard . . .just a kid, same dark curly hair, suntanned face, typical young Yid settler. Moshe Kazra, you are charged. . .blew up the barracks at Haifa. Others got away, but Kazra captured, wounded. Wouldn't recognise the court, not a word during the whole trial, just sat there, sullen, like a school-boy. . . only eighteen anyway, just a kid. Get the drop all right. And me, too. Eighteen. . .seven years less of it than me. . .eye for an eye. . .or I for an I. . .then blind. . .forever

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. . . small I for a big I, both big I's to selves, suppose . . . there, but for the grace of God, go I . . . and eyes, blind, ended, gone. . . forever. . .

—Your food comes, sergeant.

A tray was rattled against the door, which was opened, and a woman's voice said, in Hebrew:

—That is your food, Josef. Take it.

The guard murmured thanks and the tray was put down near Delaney.

—Your meal I have also, sergeant, said the woman, speaking haltingly and nervously in English.

—Can I take this blindfold off? he asked.

—No, no you must not do that.

—It'll be a damned messy business then, eating.

There was a moment's pause. The guard translated the words into Hebrew:

—I will make to feed you then, sergeant. Yes? asked the woman.

—All right. Only way, I suppose.

The dish was a highly-seasoned stew, polenta with some sort of fish in it. After a spoonful, he said:

—Very good. Did you cook it?

—Yes, she answered quietly.

—Tasted something like it before, somewhere. Can't remember where.

The woman said nothing, but touched the spoon against his lips again. He continued eating, slowly, trying to remember . . . that taste, where? Where before?

When he had eaten enough, he asked for a drink and the woman handed him a glass of wine. As he took it, his fingers touched hers—they were warm and soft. Then he heard her lift the tray and move towards the door.

—I leave the wine-bottle with you, sergeant.

—Thanks. And thanks for the feeding.

—I was glad.

The door closed quietly and he was gone. For a time, he lay sipping the wine. It was heavy and acid to the tongue . . . Red wine, perhaps? Then he asked abruptly:

—What is the woman's name?

—I am forbidden to tell you, sergeant.

—She's a good cook. What does she look like? Is she beautiful, handsome?

—Some would say that, sergeant.

—Young? With dark hair and black eyes and high breasts?

—Perhaps.

He became silent again, drinking slowly, and wonder-

ing. . . That taste, fish and polenta and peppers? And sharp red wine? Where, where? Long ago, where? Dark hair and black eyes and high breasts? And that taste? Katrishka! Yes, of course, Katrishka. . . that night on Kerissa, she cooked it on the little charcoal stove and we ate it, slowly, polenta and fish and peppers, on the veranda and we sat and drank red wine, talking. . . Kerissa. . . far away, Dalmatia, and the other islands, Brazza and Curzola and Lesina, during the war, in the Army. . . the long days in the brittle sunlight and the islands rising cleanly, pale-grey rocks against the dark-green shrubs, out of the hard blue sea. . . and that evening, sitting close to her, Katrishka, and her shining dark hair falling and her deep black eyes. . . the partizans singing choruses down in the canteen by the harbour and the light dying, with the islands clear, distant silhouettes above the silver water. . . and she read my name from inside my cap, slowly and breaking up the words—Pat-reek Del-an-ee, and we laughed and her skin was lean and smooth and brown, then kissing her, when she whispered—Patrishka and Katrishka, laughing softly. . .

He reached out for the bottle and re-filled his glass with wine. The more rapid cooling of the air told him that it was almost dusk, and sounds from outside, coming clearly through the stillness, gave him hints of his whereabouts. The whine of a heavy truck changing gear—not far from the main road. The drowsy, lonely purr of an aeroplane flying high above, circling, then coming in, crossing low and loudly overhead—the Army recce-plane landing at the airstrip to the west of the town.

The sirens suddenly wailed out a curfew-alarm.

—They've missed me from the barracks, he commented to the guard.

—Yes, our radio has announced that you are being held as a hostage.

—They'll soon be along to collect me.

—I think not, sergeant.

—You'll see.

Shortly afterwards, the clatter of sheep-bells announced the flocks, as they were hurried in from the pastures. . . Must be right on the edge of the Old Town. Be a job for them to find me here. The Super'll be tearing his hair now; the whole division out clearing the streets and patrolling and searching. Not much time left, Kazra is due for the drop in the morning. No chance of making a break out of here, not a hope in hell. This blindfold act is clever, damn clever. The tommy-

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gun would have me full of slugs before I could see. A sitting bird. Blast it!

He re-filled his glass and listened again. . . .Not a sound. The streets all emptied now; the strongpoints manned for evening stand-to; the town holding its breath and the shadows flowing amongst the old houses. . . .A single rifle-shot echoed from a distance. . . .Some poor Wog caught out in the street. . . .

A remembered tune began to flicker amongst his thoughts. He hummed it for a moment, then began to sing softly:

—She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers are round her sighing,
But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying. . . .

—A song of your country, sergeant? asked the guard, quietly.

—Yes, a come-all-ye, a patriotic song. By a poet called Thomas Moore. Can't remember half of it. How does it go now? She sings the wild songs of her dear native plains. . . . No, can't remember it, except for the last verse. It goes . . .

—Oh! make her a grave where the sunbeams rest
When they promise a glorious morrow;
They'll shine o'er her sleep, like a smile from the West,
From her own loved island of sorrow.

—That is a sad song, and beautiful. Not a song for fighting, sergeant.

—No, not a song for fighting. As well, perhaps. . . .why fight?

Silence fell between them again. After a while, Delaney asked to be taken to the lavatory. When he stood upright, he realised that he was getting drunk. The wine was urgent in his veins, exciting his thoughts, but softening his will to act, to resist, to escape. He was guided a short distance down the corridor by the guard, who cautiously walked behind him and waited for him at the open door.

As they were returning, somebody came up the stairway at the other end of the corridor.

—Your supper is being brought, remarked the guard.

The woman entered close behind them and laid down a tray on the bedside table, saying:

This meal you are able to eat yourself, sergeant. It is of. . . .what you call them?

Sandwiches, interjected the guard.

I will stay to guard the sergeant for a time, Josef. You go below for your meal.

The guard left them, carefully locking the door behind him.

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Delaney reached out his hand to the tray and found a sandwich. It was filled with spiced meat and pickle.

—Excellent, he praised. You feed me well.

—There is cheese also, sergeant.

—Aren't you afraid I'll attack you and escape?

—I have a pistol in my hand, and I shoot well.

—Oh! I'd better keep quiet then. I've remembered where I tasted that other food before. In Yugoslavia, on an island off Dalmatia—Kerissa.

—You have been there? the woman asked with surprise.

—Yes, during the war, in the Army, fighting with the partizans.

—I came from Lagosta, she said softly. Many years ago, when I was a girl.

—You're not old. Your voice does not sound old.

—No, perhaps not old, but younger then. You have been to Lagosta?

—Yes, once for a few hours, raiding a German garrison. And the other islands, too, Brazza, Mileta, Curzola. . . I liked it there. We had hard times, but good times as well, and the islands are beautiful.

—It is a good place and the people are good and simple.

—But you preferred Palestine?

—My husband was killed by the Italians, because he was a Jew and a Socialist. I did not have him for long. . . .

The simple, resigned sadness of her last words left him without a reply. Far from the land where her young hero sleeps. . . .

—I came to Zion for peace, she continued, quietly, and for a new life for our son.

—Peace. . . a new life, he echoed. Here? Can Irgun bring peace, a new life?

There was a pause, then she said hopelessly:

—The weapon has been forced into our hands. I came here only that my son should not always live a refugee, that he should have a homeland and live without violence. Perhaps, you cannot understand. The English have a homeland, are not persecuted.

—But I'm not English. I'm an Irishman, he insisted drunkenly.

—Irishman? But you fight for the English? Your people drove out the English from their homeland. Why then do you fight for the English?

He revolved the cool wine-glass between his fingers. Why? Yes, why? Why a wild goose? . . . Hesitantly, he replied:

—Perhaps. . . perhaps I, too, am persecuted. . . .

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—I do not understand. . . .

—By. . .by being young, by having energy. My homeland is dead, it died at birth, he said bitterly, and I have an appetite for life.

—And peace. . . .you do not wish peace?

—Peace? I don't know. Perhaps I do want peace. . . .my diet has always been war, my hunger is for violence, for movement. . . . But I'm drunk now and talking too much.

The woman said nothing for a few moments, and when she spoke again, her voice sounded older, more gentle:

—You were young when the war came?

—Yes, eighteen. Younger than I can remember, or feel—now.

—I think I can understand a little. . . .

Her words were interrupted by the guard's return. He asked quietly, in Hebrew:

—Any trouble?

—No, the sergeant has been a model prisoner, answered the woman, smilingly.

She departed without speaking again. The guard, having reseated himself, inquired, politely:

—You made a good meal, sergeant?

—Yes, fine, thanks.

—And with a pleasant hostess?

—To the ear, yes. To the eye, I can't tell.

—A pity.

The conversation ended, for the sergeant's thoughts were struggling to visualise the woman, to extract a picture of her from her words, from his own memories of her lost homeland. . . .Far from the land. . . .from the islands, from Lagosta,her own loved island of sorrow. . . .many years ago, when I was a girl. . . .younger then. . . .like the partizan girls?peasant girls, stocky and ugly, in trousers and rough, ill-fitting battledress, the flat Slav faces, weathered, but all with the oriental mystery of deep-set black eyes. . . .or, like Katrishka?. . . .her vivid, slender body and the clear, taut brown skin. . . .her hair, jet, sheened, silken hair, falling. . . . Peace? Violence?. . . .the sudden touch of her body during the long still nights, blood racing wildly beneath the calm of smooth brown skin. . . . Peace? Violence?. . . .or those nights, sliding across the black glass floor of sea to a dawn raid, engines purring softly below deck and the shadow of the coast climbing ahead, then the quick crackling flame of a machine-gun, a blazing tongue of violence under the vast domed peace of night. . . .or those days, lying amongst the clear-cut rocks and the dark-green shrubs, in the crisp, dry air, lying in the

bright keen stillness of the hot sun, waiting to go into an attack, waiting for the surging painless ecstasy of movement, of violence, beneath the rigid blue sky. . . .Peace? What is peace? And a homeland? Dublin? Ireland? Was that peace—life in Dublin again? . . .the return to my homeland. . . .dead, died at birth. . . .the return to the city when it was finished, after demobilisation, to the cold shoulder of the city under a grey sky, a stranger in the remembered streets, the long decaying terraces of sooted stone, the weighted shadows of dead Georgian houses, the cheap glitter of shop-windows, the pale hard faces of hawkers in Moore Street, the slow wearied shuffle of feet on the crowded slush-brown pavements, ragged men huddling beneath the shadow of the Customs House, eyeing the cold answer of the Liffey, broken fragments of words heard in the street, blank eyes in flaccid faces, the suffocating terror of loneliness in cheap rented rooms in the North City, the cry of a train-whistle in early morning, the hushed lamentation of rain falling. . . .Was that peace, a homeland? . . .with always a longing for a return. . . .a longing for a return? . . .a return to the peace and violence of fierce bright sun and hard blue sky, to the beauty of new places, unknown towns and the beckoning of gaps in high mountain ranges, to the taut brown skin and the deep mystery of black eyes, to Katrishka and the dark-green islands again. . . .return? Never. . . .only this, a Palestine policeman, nursemaiding squabbling Yids and Wogs, amongst the low dusty-red hills, in stinking dry-baked towns. . . .yes, back to the sun and the blue sky, but never the full circle, never the same again, always the disillusion, the half-measure of memory. . . .And now? The End. . . .perhaps . . .but no return. . . .never Katrishka, the islands again. . . .never again . . .never. . . .only, perhaps. . . .an end . . .His head drooped forward as sleep suddenly overflowed his thoughts.

* * *

—Sergeant! Sergeant Delaney! Wake up!

A hand was shaking at his arm. He sat up, bemused, and the blindfold was removed from his eyes, leaving him dazzled in a bright light.

He saw around him the close walls of a small white-washed room, lit by a bare electric bulb. The guard, the young Jewish settler whom he had caught sight of as he was kidnapped, was stepping back from him, holding a tommygun at the alert. Another man, slightly-built, with thinning brown hair and a lean, watchful face, stood by the door, holding a typewritten paper in his hand.

The air of the room was cold. Delaney swung his legs off

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the low bed and stood up, shivering slightly. Except for the bed, a chair and a low table with the wine-bottle on it, the room was bare of furniture. High in one wall, a barred window showed a single star and a slate-blue night sky.

The man by the door cleared his throat, nervously. He began to speak with the cultured voice which Delaney remembered from that afternoon, but with an undertone of disquiet, and with eyes lowered towards the paper in his hand:

—Sergeant Delaney, this evening our radio broadcast an appeal to the authorities, asking that they spare the life of Moshe Kazra in return for your life. That appeal was made nine hours ago, and no reply has been received from the authorities up to the present time. In two hours time, Kazra is due to be executed at Acre Prison. If that execution is carried out, it is the order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Liberation Army of Zion that you be taken to an appointed place and executed in reprisal.

The man paused, with his head bowed. The guard shifted his feet, uneasily.

—I see. . . ., said Delaney, his voice sounding from a long way off.

A restfulness sank through his limbs, and his brain was suddenly clear, drained of emotion. So this is the last of it, the end. . . .so quietly, so soon. . . .

—We find it impossible to . . .bring you a priest, the spokesman continued, with regret, hopelessness dragging on his words.

—I need no priest.

—Perhaps. . . perhaps there is something else, sergeant? Food? A drink. . .spirits?

—No. No food. A drink, please.

—It will be brought. I. . .I am. . . sorry, sergeant.

The man turned away, abruptly, and left the room. The guard sat down, keeping his eyes averted.

After a moment, Delaney seated himself on the edge of the bed. As he lit a cigarette, he noticed that his hands were steady, but that they felt strange, abstracted from his senses. . . .So this is the end of it, no terror, just a quiet, a void in the belly, and the mind, cold, expectant. . . . like the war, before attacks, only certain now. And Kazra, waiting for it now, too. . . wonder is it the same. . . being younger, being a Jew. . . the same, I suppose. . . the same question with the final answer. . . final, yes, to know or not to know, to be or not to be. . . A peace or a violence? . . . the last violence, the last peace. . . a stillness, perhaps. . . an end. . . eye for an eye. . . blindness, or maybe sight. . . soon. . . two hours. . . feel it now, the urge, the impatience, to know. . . or

never know. . . .but soon. . . .an end or a beginning. . . .a violence or a peace. . . .soon. . . .

He glanced up, to catch the guard watching him, covertly.

—I, too, am sorry, sergeant, said the Jew, avoiding his eyes.

—Sorry? he repeated. Sorry? I don't know. Maybe, but it's all easier than I thought before. Not fear, not terror, not even pity for myself. But it may be real fear, this urge to know for certain that it is. . . .the end. . . .

—I have seen little death, said the Jew, quietly.

There was a sudden knock on the door. The guard opened it and took a glass from somebody outside. Delaney heard the woman's voice murmur something, and her footfalls dying away down the corridor.

—Wouldn't she come in? he asked.

—No. It was better that she did not, answered the guard.

The glass contained a colourless native spirit. Delaney drank it at a gulp and felt its raw flame burn in the tensed hollowness of his stomach. Then he said:

—I'd have liked to have seen her, to have thanked her. She was kind.

The young Jew was silent, and fiddled with the clip of his tommygun. Then began to speak with a nervous haste:

—It is not good for you to know, sergeant, but her son is this night in Acre Prison. He is Moshe Kazra. . . .

The impact of his words was suddenly reinforced by the whiplash crackling of a machine-gun outside. A rifle-shot replied from close below the window. The sound of running feet echoed in the corridor and a voice shouted:

—The soldiers! Cover the back-door, Josef! Lock in the prisoner!

The guard sprang from the room, slamming and locking the door. The light was switched off. Delaney grabbed the chair and placed it below the window. Another deafening burst from a machine-gun struck the building and a single whining ricochet starred the inside wall opposite the window. A third burst howled and clanged across the iron bars and splintered a shower of plaster around the room. He dropped, and crouched on the floor. Bloody fools! They'll kill me along with these Yids! A tommygun was fired, much closer. Then he heard a hollow belch. A mortar! The stupid bastards! A plop overhead. Thank God! Only a parachute flare. A pale greenish light crept through the window, lighting up the room, and then faded. The machine-gun again, with its bullets tweetering above the roof. Covering fire! They're moving in! A tommygun stuttered, closer. Better let them know I'm here. He began to sing, loudly, out of tune:

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—She is far from the land where. . .

Two grenades exploded downstairs in the house, drowning his voice.

. . . But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps,

For her heart in his grave is ly. . . .

The door of the room was flung open. He saw a woman's figure outlined in the doorway and heard her call:

—Look away, sergeant! Look away!

The blazing explosion of a tommygun flickered and thundered in the room for a second, then the woman turned from the sprawled, shattered body and faced down the corridor, the weapon held ready.

Heavy boots clattered up the stairway. . . .



CONSTANCE MADDEN



Snow

Too many seasons had I walked secure,
Pacing the guarded pathways of the mind,
Slow to adventure, visionless to find
The unmarked ways, the unattempted moor;
Watching the sliding hours from dawn to night,
The year from cradling Spring to Winter's grave,
And Nature was my pleasure and my slave,
My sheltered garden, my enclosed delight;
Till in one night the silent-footed snow
Softly around the hills and valleys curled,
And I, unarmoured in an alien world.
Woke to the fear the desert dwellers know;
Who see their footprints dying in the sand,
And they, as I, but pilgrims in the land.

MICHAEL LUCEY



Poignant

"YOU look sad," says my mother.

"Sort of," says I.

"What's worryin' yeh?"

"Nothin'. 'Tisn't worry, 'tis. . . ."

"What?" tender-like.

"The boy," says dad putting in his spoke, "needs fresh air. Go out an' play, Dan."

"'Tis hunger," says Rosie. "Bread an' butter isn't good enough for him, he wants jam on top of it." Taking another bite of bread, "Dooney have jam in his shop now."

"Me hard-earned money isn't going on jam."

Says I, "I don't want jam."

"Then what do yeh want?"

"Nothin'. I just. . . ."

"Oh, go out an' play, boy."

Mother looked into my eyes. "You've got something on yer mind."

"I have an' I haven't, mother."

"When it takes him like that," says Rosie slyly, "he needs jam."

Dad looked bored. "Ye two don't even have to go to school on Saturday, but I have to work. On'y today there was no coal to shovel. So would the two of ye dance out while I talk with yer mother about more serious things than jam."

Rosie was dancing ahead of me.

"Wait, Dan," says my mother. "Can yeh give us some hint at all of what you mean?"

"I'm trying to remember. It's—yes, it's a word."

"What word?"

"Starting with 'pog'—pog something."

"Po'gnant," says Rosie from the door.

"The very word. Now where did I hear it? Can't remember. But what do it mean, Rosie?"

"I d'no."

"Mother?"

"I'm no good for words."

"Dad?"

He scratched his bald patch. "Po'gnant? 'Twouldn't be pregnant'?"

"No. But what do 'pregnant' mean?"

"We know that. It means—Lil, aren't they learning too many words?"

Mother scratched her lip, very puzzled.

Says Rosie, "I know."

Straight to her went Dad and I.

"Second class had it in school today."

"Out with it!" he shouts.

"'Tis a poetry: 'Some heart once *pregnant* with celestial fire.'"

"Oh, some heart. . . ." He went to the fire, where mother was considering.

"We're as wise as ever," I says, but I'd a hazy idea of the meaning. "What's 'celestial'?"

Mother looked up. "I'll tell yeh what, Dan. When the two of ye come in for supper, we'll've got a loan of Dooney's dictionary, an' we'll look up all the words. Be in before half-eight."

"An' clear now!" shouts dad.

Up on the top I says to Rosie, "I don't play with girls. Clear."

"No one asked yeh, big boy." And she skipped up to the Pawl Bwee.

Off with me down the Lower Road. It was still hot and I didn't want to get puffed out trudging up hills when I could go leisurely down. Besides, I'd a notion I'd go round by the stile and back the High Road—taking the hill in the cool of the evening.

A notion that I'd travel that route. I didn't know, though, for it wasn't just for a walk I was going. There was a word in my mind and I was seeking the meaning.

I passed people. Old Joe Higgins coming from the pump with two buckets of water; Moll Daw hanging over her half-door; eleven or eight of the half men heading for Donovan's pub. I said "Hallo" when anyone said "Hallo," and "Fine evenin'" when anyone said "Fine evenin'." My mind was elsewhere and I wouldn't have saluted if they didn't.

It was when there wasn't a Christian in view I realised my search was for someone. Who?

By the pump was the usual bunch of men, mostly old; and, over a bit, some women this time, of all ages. The pipe smoke looked nice; one woman had lovely red lips; but everyone was talking. I passed all hands without giving one a reck.

Again not a sinner in sight—only two punts rowing about

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the harbour and a dot that was a liner way out at sea.

Looking at them I nearly passed the figure on the seat. Two steps beyond it and all I was when, looking left (I don't know why), the eyes caught mine. Queer eyes they were, deep and attractive. I stopped.

"Grand evenin'," says I.

Why hadn't he heard me first? He seemed a knowing man. He ordered, "Sit down."

I went to his end of the seat and sat right up to him.

"Wha's yer name, young Burke?"

"Dan."

"Dan, ah." Singing, "Dan, Dan, the funny oul' man."

There was something queer about him. My mother said Barney was very knowing but foolish.

Says I, "Do yeh know the meaning of the word—"

"What do I know about the word? I don't know nothin'; no one knows nothin', so you'll never find out nothin.' Get out of me mouth!"

Jig be jolt with him as I was, feeling he was a knowing man, light dawned. Then I knew what was wrong with him. Mother kept warning about steering clear of his likes. He was sitting quiet there—spificated! I fled.

Away through the stile and up to the top of the High Road. Coming up from the village towards me was a courting couple, Willie Coleman and Maisie Collins. They were getting married next week.

They stopped and turned in to the harbour, looking down on the quiet, blue water.

'Fine evenin',' I says, to their backs. They turned, startled.

"Grand, Dan," Willie.

"You're out late," says Maisie.

"Me? No, I don't have to be in till supper time—about half eight."

Willie looked at his watch. "'Tis ten past now."

"Could one of ye tell me the meaning of the word—'po'nant'?"

Maisie put a finger to a very pink cheek. "I know it," she muses, "but can't think of it just now."

"'Twas never even learnt to me at school." Willie, wide-eyed.

"I see someone coming I know knows it." With that I left them staring after me—hurrying to meet the form coming up from the red sun in a crimson sky.

It was the man who lived in the red house by the rocks in the next village. A well-off man and well-up too. You could see it all in his appearance; though no one rightly knew if

he did anything for a living, was retired or was left loading dry of gold.

What puzzled me now was what he carried. He lived alone, no kids nor nothing; but under his arm he had an aged-looking, black-faced sort of doll.

"Lovely evenin'," says I, stopping.

"Beautiful. You're looking at a sphinx, one of the famed, wise gods of ancient Egypt."

I stared harder at it, then looked at him.

"What's po'gnant?"

"You mean the word pronounced 'poin-ant'? It—well, I'd define it as 'sharply moving the emotions.' Perhaps you don't quite understand, but you will when you get older."

"I do now."

"You do? Oh. . . ."

He was at a loss for something to say, so I said I was hurrying home and parted with "Beautiful evenin'."

Getting in before the chill set in, mother, dad, and Rosie were just sitting down to supper. There was jam on the table.

"Oh," says mother, "we got Dooney's dictionary but had to take it back again. I took down the meaning though. Here you are: 'pregnant,' full of meaning; 'celestial,' heavenly. What's the other word, Dan? Rosie, you've it in your head."

"Poignant," she pronounced it right, "means stinging, vivid, moving and," with relish, "pungent."

I smiled.



REARDEN CONNER



The Long Pike

ONCE a month the little boy was taken over to his Aunt Mag's place by his mother. They drove in a trap drawn by an ageing pony that had been in the family long before the boy was born. It was a great adventure, this drive to his Aunt Mag's, across the countryside and through the villages to the gaunt house forty miles away.

For days before the journey the little boy was busy polishing the trap, burnishing up the brass lanterns and seeing that the fat candles were firmly in the holders. Even the tedious business of cleaning the pony's harness became something of a joy, for the boy wished to feel that the trap was a bright chariot and the old pony a prancing steed.

In spring the countryside was a vision of glory. The hedges bounding the narrow roads were heavy with blossom and the clover flowers shone wine-red above their dark-green leaves. The birds trilled their exquisite notes on the branches of the trees that threw pools of shade like dark carpets for the few wayfarers.

In summer the wild flowers mantled the ditches and in the fields buttercups and cowslips spread shawls of gold and yellow. The cottages in the villages were clad in their garments of roses, and here and there one was capped by new thatch that glowed in the vivid light. The boy clapped hands in delight at all these sights and his words tumbled out and buzzed in his mother's ears like bees let loose from a dark hive.

But in the autumn and winter the countryside seemed to weep as the rain drifted over from the mountains and as the trees shed their leaves and stood cold and forlorn before the breath of the wind. The cottages seemed to hunch down into themselves as if in sleep and the thatch lost its warm hue and became a sodden thing that seemed to batten down the very life within. The boy sat then in the trap, as still as one of the leafless bushes, wrapped in oilskins, and listened to the *clop-clop-clop* of the pony's hooves on the earthen road. He tried to count the beat of the hooves on the road and his mind grew bewildered, so that he had to begin all over again, until he grew weary and nodded drowsily against the side of the trap.

Aunt Mag was a woman past middle age who lived alone in a tall, narrow house a few miles from the nearest village. "Bleak House" the boy's father called the place, and bleak enough it looked with its creeper-less walls and its stark, oblong windows. Aunt Mag herself was somehow bleak and stuffy, with her narrow, horse-like face below greying hair that was flattened down severely, and her thin body clad always in a black dress that reached almost to her ankles. Her eyes were cold and inclined to stare, and she had the type of inquiring mind that wished to know as soon as possible how the little boy was progressing at his schooling.

But the interior of that grey house was anything but bleak. Its parlour was full of the cosiest red, plush furniture, almost too heavy to move, and every room was crowded with knick-knacks that fascinated the boy. There were albums crammed with postcards collected from all over the world, showing wonderful views, and piles of old illustrated magazines which awakened the boy's imagination and sent it leaping back along the years like a frisky rabbit.

There was a quaint bathroom in the house, to which the water had to be carried laboriously and emptied into the dented bath. On the wall above the bath hung a map of the world, with the steamer routes marked in red. The little boy travelled them all in turn and saw, as if in reality, the vast buildings and the wide rivers that were shut up so carefully in the postcard albums downstairs.

Above the bathroom there was a garret, and here there were treasures galore. Boxes full of faded Christmas decorations stood beside a pile of mildewed fancy dress costumes. There was a drawer, pulled from some chest and never used again, half-full of jet ornaments. The boy clambered into the garret while his elders talked downstairs and dressed himself up in the most fanciful garments and dreamed of great doings and of noble conquests.

When the time came for tea his Aunt Mag would strike a gong which she used only on those monthly visits. The slow, heavy notes would boom around the old house and vibrate from wall to wall as if shimmering with pride at having awakened that which had slept so long. They would reach up to the garret, like echoes from some dim world of the past. Then the boy would climb down hurriedly from his haven of dreams and make his way to the tea table, for Aunt Mag was a strict disciplinarian who could not tolerate a minute's hold-up in her schedule.

At tea the little boy would sit, staring across the table at

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the long, stuffed pike in the glass case which hung on one of the parlour walls. Even the pleasure of eating his Aunt Mag's delicacies could not blur the fascination of that lifeless pike. Aunt Mag had long since grown tired of telling how her husband, who had gone to his last rest before the boy had seen the light of day, had caught it after a notable battle and had won for himself the acclaim of anglers for miles around.

The pike was now a mere dusty relic, faded and ignored. It was difficult even for the little boy to believe that once it had swum strongly and had fought fiercely for its life. It had become a part of the parlour wall, of the room itself, even of Aunt Mag. And yet . . . there was the persistent fascination of it, which kept the boy's eyes riveted on it even when he was stuffing plum cake into his mouth.

In his seventh year a strange thing happened to the boy. He began to see the objects around him in a detached way no longer, but in a very personal sense. Instinctively he sorted out those that were of importance to him and he brooded over them as if wishing to drink into himself something of their purpose in the scheme of things.

It was then that he began to covet the long pike in the glass case. He found himself talking about it as he drove with his mother in the trap across the countryside. "Do you think that the pike will still be there?" he would ask.

"Of course it will," his mother would tell him. "Why shouldn't it be?"

"Do you think Aunt Mag will ever get tired of it?"

"I don't know, son. Why don't you ask her yourself? It seems to me that Aunt Mag never gets tired of anything the way she holds on to all that old junk she has."

But the boy could never muster up the courage to ask Aunt Mag about the pike. She was a difficult enough woman to talk to, even when he was on safe ground with his lessons at school. Her mind seemed so remote from his, so immersed in the decades gone by, that there was no safe meeting place where he could talk to her about the things that really held his interest.

One day, in early spring, he was startled almost out of his wits when Aunt Mag turned her horse-like face to him at the tea table and said, "You keep on staring at that old fish as if it was made of gold. Sure if you think so much of it you can have it, and very welcome."

That was a great evening for the little boy. They drove home in the trap through a drizzle that covered the glass case with a jewelled net of moisture. "I don't know what to do."

world you want with that old fish . . ." his mother grumbled. "But maybe the glass in the case will be useful for your father."

The boy was silent. The long pike had ceased now to be a part of Aunt Mag and had become a part of himself. In the morning he would take it out of the case and carry it to the narrow river near his home and place it in the water. Then, perhaps, somehow, it would swim again, like the magic fishes of the legends, and he would be proud of it and his heart would go bounding at the sight of it as it flashed down below between the water weeds.

At dawn he was out of his parents' house and he was running to the river with the long pike in his arms. He made for the deep pool where the water was so black that no one could see to the bottom. He laid the fish reverently on the dew-covered bank and undressed rapidly, quivering with pleasure at the touch of the wet grass on his bare feet.

He was a good swimmer and soon he was in the water, holding the pike before him, darting it across the pool as if he were frolicking with it under the first shy sunrays. Round and round the pool he went, his heart racing with joy at the tang of the water and at possession of the fish.

Suddenly he felt a sharp pain tear through his right foot. He jerked the foot upwards and a moment later he squirmed as the slimy body of an eel brushed across his thigh. The head of the eel broke water and he saw that it was a conger, savage at being disturbed.

He struck at the eel with his fist and he felt the needle-like teeth close on his wrist. He screamed so shrilly that a crane farther down the river was startled into flight. He remembered grabbing at the head of the eel with his free hand and feeling the buffeting of his limbs as the strong, lithe body whipped at him and gripped at one leg with the scale-less tail. Then he was dragged forward and backwards until his head was under water and a queer, singing blackness came over his brain and he drifted into what seemed like a wide, cool tunnel where no sound reached him.

It was a long time before he opened his eyes again. He was lying flat on his back on the river bank and the sun was streaming down around him. He could hear a bird fluting its song from a tree away to his right. The sweet, persistent note nagged at his brain, filling it with sound until a wealth of rich music seemed to lap over and flood his bewildered mind.

He saw someone bending over him, and he heard a voice coming to him as if from the depths of that black tunnel in which he had been drifting, "A good thing I heard that scream

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you gave or you'd have been a goner! And do you know . . . when I took you out of the water you had your thumbs stuck in the gills of the biggest conger I've seen round these parts, and it as dead as the branch of a tree. And if that doesn't make your da hop out of his shoes with pride I'll eat my ould hat, band, fish-hooks, birds' droppings and all!"

* * *

In due course the conger eel was stuffed and given the place of honour in the glass case that had held the pike for so many years. But the boy had no interest in it. He was never able to find the long pike. Perhaps it had drifted down with the swift-flowing river or was ripped to pieces by the baffled cranes. But whatever happened to it there was no trace of it when he searched for miles along the river bank.

He travelled across the countryside in the trap with his mother to his Aunt Mag's place, trembling with dread at the thought of her reaction to the loss of the pike. But she had no patience with the story of the conger eel. "And has that old pike gone at last!" she said, when they had told her the news. "Well, I'm glad to hear it. Sure the old devil lived here in this parlour so long that I'd grown afraid of it. Honest to God now, I had so. And I'd have chucked it out ages ago if it hadn't been for the way Christy was so proud of having bested it."

The little boy listened to this in a shocked silence. Now that the long pike was gone he coveted it more than ever. Sometimes he sat brooding over it when the dusk was creeping across the land and the distractions of the day were shrouded from his eyes. Then his grandfather, who was an old and wise man and steeped in folklore, came and took him by the hand and led him to the little stone bridge humped over the river.

"Look down there, son . . ." he said, as the first moonray touched the water. "There's your long pike that drifted down to the sea when you let go of him and got new life in the deep water and is now swimming up again with the great, throbbing strength in him that laughs at death."

The boy looked then and saw the pale touch of light on the black water. It went and came again as the clouds parted, and flickered over the water with a queer, life-like movement that brought a thrill to his heart. He watched it with round eyes, holding his grandfather's hand tightly, and he felt that part of his spirit went with it on its journey down the long, winding river.

He turned away from the bridge with a curious feeling of happiness in his breast. And thinking of the whole experience

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as he lay in his narrow bed he could see the various aspects of it in an entirely new light. The bleak, gaunt house forty miles away, the stuffy over-furnished parlour, and Aunt Mag herself with her horse-like face and her long, black dress took on a fresh significance. He turned over on to his side and sighed with contentment, as if he had solved one of the deeper mysteries of life.

EWART MILNE



Evergreen

The signals spelled summer but for me it was spring,
There was talk in the air of how green grew the nation
And I played with my brothers in a fir-tree plantation,
The signals spelled summer but for me it was spring.

Cathleen the Countess the country was waking,
Not far were the hills through the eyes of my mother,
The trees in the orchard bore bullets at Easter,
Cathleen the Countess was what they were fruiting.

The signals spelled harvest but for me it was over,
My brothers were scattered and the fir-tree plantation,
Though the talk still went on of how green grew the nation
And the signals spelled harvest, but for me it was over.

In October's reality an image of spring
Restores me and my brothers and the fir-tree plantation,
Restores Countess and mother and the green of the nation.
The October reality, the image of spring.

perhaps a little hesitantly, with *The Cobbler's Apprentice*, published in 1932 (and re-published in 1948). This is a simple story told with great tenderness and humour. A young boy is being taken to town to be apprenticed to a cobbler. "The aunt drove the cart out through the wide gateway.

"I'll expect you back when I see you!" said the uncle to the aunt.

Shamus looked up at the mountain,—he was wishing to see once more the friends he had there, but he must sit in the cart beside his aunt. Suddenly across the road dashed a big grey hare. The ass shied, his aunt shrieked and there they were back in the farmyard. "Not a step more will I stir this day!" declared the aunt. "A running hare across the path is a sign of terrible bad luck. The only thing to do is to turn back and keep indoors for the rest of the day!"

"Hooray!" thought Shamus. "I'll be off up the mountain and say goodbye in style!"

Next day they went, Shamus drove "while his aunt held a stone ready to throw at any more hares which tried to cross their path."

"It was grand driving along the high road in the early morning. Shamus saw the dew rising before the heat of the sun in a fine mist. Ducks waddled into pools; hens clustered at farmhouse doors for their breakfast; men carried in pails of milk from the cow sheds and blue smoke rose from chimneys. Then they came to the town."

But in the town Shamus finds a harsh master, and there are many mishaps. He finds two friends also.

"One night he woke up suddenly. He lay quite still for he thought he heard voices and at first he was afraid robbers were trying to get into the shop. One of them said:

"That boy has a hard life, so he has!"

"He has indeed!" said the second voice.

"He has a good heart in him too!"

"That's the truth. Look at the way he shares his food with us and it's little enough he gets himself!"

"Shamus knew then that it was Black Sambo the cat, and Moses, the dog, who were talking. He wanted to hear what else they had to say, but he moved and banged his head against the wall. "Someone's awake!" whispered Black Sambo. And both the cat and the dog pretended to be asleep. "It was only me!" said Shamus, slipping out of his bed behind the door and coming over to the fire.

Black Sambo opened one eye and looked up at him.

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Mee-ow! she said, and began to wash her whiskers.
"You weren't talking like that to Moses just now!"
said Shamus." . . .

In Miss Lynch's stories there are, nearly always, those who can understand animal language, and those who cannot, and the fact that the less favoured walk side by side with their animal-conversing comrades makes the fantasy the more delightfully tantalising. "Betsy can talk!" cries Sheila, in *The Grey Goose of Kilnevin*—Betsy is her pet goose whose 'hissing' has become intelligible, but Fergus, Sheila's friend, grows cross and refuses to believe.

The Turf-Cutter's Donkey—the second of this author's books—has won world-wide recognition; has been acclaimed a classic. It stands beside *Alice in Wonderland*, and is held up reprovably to *Peter Pan* rebuking that book for the sentimentality with which it abounds. How quickly children grow restless under the false note of sentimentality! How they love commonsense! But when commonsense and fantasy take hands, as with Miss Lynch, then delight swells to a clamour for "more." This is the word used, as parents tell us, in relation to the Patricia Lynch books.

One remarkable thing about this author is her so sudden emergence as a master craftsman. Of very many writers, under study, we may take notes—"Here the author may be seen as a beginner, here his sense of proportion has strengthened . . . but he still lacks . . . Here he has gained more control. Here for the first time we find . . ." and so on. But with Miss Lynch, as was the case with J. M. Synge, we are startled, joyfully startled, by an early arrival at complete mastership. From now on, from the time of the publication of this second book, all that she writes is hall-marked. No matter how the subjects vary, how free the movement appears to be, they are all 'under rein.' The roads may lead across bogs, up mountain sides, through villages of dream, or into mist-enveloped land, but still the master's hand controls it all.

The Turf-cutter's Donkey Goes Visiting is packed with adventure. Eileen and Seamus are wandering on the wood hillside, and being young people to whom the unexpected always happens, they stray into the camp of the Fianna. Eileen is the first to realise this. "They are warriors," she whispered. "Seamus! This must be the wood of the Fianna" . . . "They stood looking at the warriors with their gay cloaks and gleaming helmets. Some were playing chess with wonderfully carved men, and their boards were flat rocks marked in squares. Others were listening to a storyteller who kept stopping to drink from a silver goblet. Seated on a fallen tree was a harper who leaned against his harp and listened to the story.

Beyond the crowd, seated in a carved chair was the great Finn himself."

Finn made them welcome, listened to their story, bade them sit down and share the feast and music.

"'Here is the wine of dreams,' said the man with the horn as he knelt before the children and handed them each a silver cup filled with golden wine."

But a strange sound comes through the wood—"Hee-haw! Hee-haw!"

"It's Long Ears!" cried Eileen (Long Ears was their donkey). "Seamus, we must go back!"

And so real life intrudes again . . .

Merriment, candour, a sense of the loveliness in homely things, these make Miss Lynch's books a joy to read, and part of her great attraction is the casual way in which so much is offered. No stressing, no italics for her, ever. "The Ballad Singer had beautiful manners when he remembered." A similar quiet humour in Hans Christian Andersen—"The pea was put in the art museum, and it is there now, unless somebody has taken it."

King of the Tinkers comes next, published in 1938—a lovely book, full of restrained excitement. What a dare-devil fellow the Chief Tinker is! 'Yellow Handkerchief' they call him by reason of his headgear. He loves to sing:—

"I'm the cliverest thief in the whole wide world
Bolt the door when I pass by,
Fasten the windas an count the hins,
And shut the pig in the sty.
But bolt ye may
An shutter ye may,
And watch all night an' day—
Right from under yer nose I'll lift all I want
An I'll dar yez to say me nay!"

But this is not enough for him. "Listen to me, Michael Fahy," the Tinker Chief said softly: "'Tis my ambition to be king of all the tinkers of Ireland."

The Grey Goose of Kilnevin, published in 1940, and very beautifully illustrated by Sean Keating, tells the story of Betsy, a very small goose, who makes up her mind that she will go to the Fair. Her owner, Jim Daly, does not wish to take her; she would spoil the look of his fine white flock. But, in the early morning when he comes for the flock, Betsy slips out with them. "The moon was still in the sky and the geese were cross at being roused so early, as if they were wild geese. But Jim Daly wanted to be in Kilnevin by seven o'clock, so he took no notice of the angry hissings which rose all round him.

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Cracking his switch he soon had every goose through the gate and out on the winding boreen.

"The geese stretched their necks and went along the boreen hissing at the shadows. When the moonlight shone on a puddle they hissed at that, and when the wind rustled the thorn bushes they hissed louder still.

Jim Daly marched along behind them, and, last of all, came the little grey goose.

She waddled along happily looking at the shadows, the glistening pools, and the fluttering tufts of grass. She slithered over stones, she splashed into pools, but never once did she hiss. Time enough for that when they reached the Fair . . . "Now the little grey goose discovered that others were going to the Fair. There were horses and cows, drovers with big sticks and boys and dogs. They made all the noise they could. The clattering and lowing, the shouting and barking, raised such a din that the little grey goose began to wish she had stayed behind in the barn. She looked back, but the boreen was so dark and lonely that she bravely waddled out on the road, following Jim Daly's boots and the white geese". . . I can march as quickly as any of them! thought the little grey goose proudly. The rain ceased. There was a quietness that comes over mountains just before dawn, and it was then she heard the beating of many wings high in the air.

The little grey goose put her head on one side and took a quick look upwards with one eye.

A great shadow, shaped like a big V, was flying overhead. It was formed by dozens of birds, their necks outstretched, their wings beating together, and down to the earth floated their wild cry: 'Honk! Honk!'

"The wild geese were flying overhead!"

I have given this passage, because it seems to me so very beautiful. And because I realise that, by reading it, others are brought nearer to Patricia Lynch than by anything I could say about her. Betsy had many adventures, the book is brimful of fun, and of people to be remembered.

Fiddler's Quest differs from those that went before in being a more 'ordinary' story. Animals do not talk, we visit no dream-world. We are concerned with Ethne Cadogan's time in Dublin, with the friends she made while there. And we are glad to find our author in a mood not yet known. How easily she steps into this role. What, being a dramatist, I call a straight story is now taken in her stride. From everyday life in Dublin we get some unforgettable pen pictures.—Moore St. on a Saturday evening . . . the quays with children wandering along deserted parts. Mrs. Rafferty, the hard-pressed mother, dominates family scenes, which are very lovely; the sharp

sorrows, the wild gaities which must be shared with the neighbours. Those gatherings! Music played the biggest part. "The two biggest things in Ethne's life had been music and her father." Eventually the grandfather, whose long delay in seeking her had been a trouble, comes, and bears her off to Inishcoppal.

With *Long Ears* Miss Lynch returns to her own world. Deliberately I call it hers, this animal-speaking, earth-conscious universe, where trees and stones and flowers play an active part; where water bears up those who cannot swim, or else a mermaid comes to their help or the Four White Swans lend their lovely cloaks . . . How beautifully these tales are interwoven with folk-lore. Here the swan, Fionuala, speaks in answer to the question "don't you want to be children?" "There are times when we long to come back"—the three smaller swans were drifting away—she spoke gently "But our coming brings storm and snow." It is good to be back again with fantasy; here, it seems to me, our author is most utterly herself.

It is the strange wild cry of the tinkers that draws Long Ears from his home. That strange cry "like a donkey heehawing—but not quite, or a horse neighing—but not quite, and it was a bit like the noise goats make when they're calling to one another . . . Long Ears forgot Red Lad's warning. He forgot Kattie Duv talking away in the shed. More than anything else in the world he wanted to follow that call." And so he goes—to a chequered career. Tinker-donkey, circus-donkey, traveller on the Road of Dreams, searcher for Crow Wood, wherever he goes meeting ups and downs with gentleness, staying brave. This long-legged, ear-flapping wanderer has a warm spot in my heart.

And now short stories—eighteen of them—with lovely illustrations. The book is called "*Strangers at the Fair.*" Fairs and races have a strong call. Peadar Hennessy hoped that, with his fiddle, he'd earn at least one shilling. So many people there,—but they did not want to listen to him. That was at Ardnaglas, but there is also the fair at Ardmore, and the great discovery of the Silver Mine, and The Tavern of the Rathshee, and Yellow Thatch in which Dinny gets wonderful help from flowering thorn trees, from a water-rat, and from a robin . . .

Knights of God: stories of the Irish Saints. Legend, and what is called 'truth' are so closely woven round these early saints that we can give no certain answer to those anxiously-minded people who persist "but is it true?" . . . We only

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know that in working on these tales the author invented nothing. She read deeply and has recorded, in simple language, the lives of Saints Ciaran, Patrick, Enda, Brigid, Brendan, Columille, Kevin, Laurence O'Toole and Ethne. With her store of learning, and background of legend-loving people, Patricia Lynch is well suited to unfold for us the history of these grand Knights. Added to this is her imaginative sympathy that illumines all she touches. The picture, envisioned by her, of the boy Ciaran, pressing close to his mother while she questions the first Christian they have ever met, is stamped vividly for me. One feels, thanks to the moving power of the writer, the deep-seated longing of this boy to visit Rome, and be himself a christian. . .

And now we are back, once more, with our Long Ears. This time the title is *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey Kicks Up His Heels*. He was never quite the same once he discovered that kicking-power! True he has learned to control it, but gone is the timid, knee-shaking laddie: he has emerged a leader. He is a helper of Eileen now. Other friends are here, the leprechaun, the squirrel, the elephant. The Wise Woman comes too, but is checked and severely reprimanded. More exciting, for young people, is the arrival of UNCLEFROMAMERICA with his CHRISTMASHAMPER!

A Storyteller's Childhood is a book to crown the others: a classic autobiography. Fittingly, from this writer, it deals with childhood years. Her earliest memories are of a tall, stone house on the north side of the River Lee, inhabited by Grandfather, aunts, uncles, mothers, brother, and herself. There were many visitors too,—special mention of Dinny Foley, the charwoman's son with whom Patricia loved to play. . . . But what she loved best, I think, was to sit beside her mother and listen to stories and poems and scraps of song. Truly she had a lovely mother, a lover of all that is fine and worth cherishing, a disdainer of cheap values. The child was nurtured on stories, meeting-place for mother and daughter. But mother and daughter are parted early. There is something deeply pathetic about the sturdy braveness of this young exile (for Patricia is taken to England when only five.) In the telling of her adventures there is no sentimentality allowed. With a lovely clear detachment we are shown this little figure pushed here, pushed there, as necessity demands.

I cannot tell more of this book. But I can say it is one that I would not, for worlds, have missed reading.

NOTE: The illustrators to these books include: Jack Yeats, Sean Keating, Harry Kernoff, Eileen Coughlan, George Altendorf.

ROBERT GREACEN

The Writer in Modern Society

THE purpose of this essay is to discuss the social and personal conditions of creative writing to-day. I also propose to deal with the function of the writer himself in modern society. The rooted *malaise* in the economic and social structure of our time is reflected in the uncertainty with which the serious writer is faced. In the course of the essay some of the causes and remedies will be examined.

Mass education, due to the effective work of the pioneers of last century, has been steadily gaining momentum in our own time. A new section of the community has produced literates by the million in these islands, only to be exploited by tabloid newspapers, bromide magazines and books that appeal to the lowest common denominator of thought and feeling. In any case the working and lower-middle classes, often fatigued by repetitive work that dulls original impulse, read less and less printed matter of any kind, for films (and to a lesser extent radio) supply emotional and recreational needs.

We can no longer nurse the pious hope that education for all to the age of fourteen years will of itself raise the level of mass culture. No argument is advanced against compulsory education; but it has a long way to go before the man-in-the-street can take even a benevolent interest in the arts. (After all, the majority of the upper middle class with the advantages—such as they are—of Public School education or its equivalent cannot get very far beyond the highly doubtful classics of Barrie or Charles Morgan).

Even a sketchy comment on the new public that has emerged leads to the question of whether the writer has in mind a given public at the time of writing. If he is a serious artist this question of a public will be subsidiary to the attempt to make his personal statement with the greatest possible impact. He naturally cannot fail to be interested in the reaction of possible readers, for if he were not concerned with them he might as well burn his manuscript as soon as it was written. As we all

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know, authors are not addicted to the murder of their brain-children. (A sour reader may murmur "More's the pity!") The very phrase "to publish" implies communication, however limited in scope. That is, if a man writes a story and hands it to his wife to read, he has in a sense "published" it, made it known. Conversely, if he throws it to the baby to play with, the story, however tearing the paper entertains the baby, is *not* published.

Pressure is exerted on the writer, indirectly sometimes, to interest as many readers as possible in his work; and even the most sensitive and conscientious editors exist in a sense to interpret or anticipate the wishes of a definite public. Mr. Cyril Connolly is probably just as interested in the reactions of those who buy *Horizon* as the editor of *Tit-Bits* in those of his readers: we know enough about Mr. Connolly, if not the editor of *Tit-Bits*, to know that he would willingly publish a writer he considered good, despite the most hysterical opposition from either readers or outside critics.

But I maintain that there is a point at which an editor (or publisher) must compromise; the extreme limit is reached, theoretically, when not a single person will pay to read the publication in question. Now unless a magazine or publishing house is heavily subsidised by a wealthy patron it will close down when it has ceased to have a public of any appreciable size. Hence my statement regarding the pressure continually—and I think rightly—exerted on a writer to attract at least a few readers; the fact of whether those readers approve his opinions or style is irrelevant to this particular argument. Indeed I can think of one well-known contemporary Irish writer who commands considerable attention because of his coast-trailing in public and the violent tone of his criticism; few agree with his ideas, although his acrobatics divert them.

Unfortunately for the health of literature, the majority of publishers want to sell books in the biggest possible quantities, whatever the literary merit of their products. As one might expect, this tendency to commercialisation is seen most blatantly in the U.S.A. where the business moguls of letters have unlimited scope for "enterprise." James T. Farrell, the novelist and critic of Irish descent, has launched a smashing attack on the centralisation and debasement of American publishing¹ which, he asserts, is proceeding at full blast. Mr. Farrell shows how the increasing demand for books means that publications of merit must be quickly swept aside to make room for furious-

(1) *The Fate of Writing in America*: reprinted in pamphlet form from *New Directions* 9. (Falcon Press, London, 1/-, 1946).

selling ephemeral work that at best has entertainment value. He details the high-powered search for a certain kind of author: —

Publishers no longer sit in offices and wait for the mailman and the literary agents to deliver manuscripts to them. They search for authors across the length and breadth of America. Hollywood has become a regular stopping-off place for publishers' representatives on the hunt for writers. A new occupation, that of the literary scout, has been created. These scouts tour the literary sandlots of America and with contract, check and fountain pen in hand, seek to sign up promising talent just as if they were scouts for a major baseball team.

Publishers in these islands have retained, fortunately, a greater sense of dignity than some of their U.S. opposite numbers. We have been warned.

Thus the writer relies on the publisher, who in turn delegates the work of selection and arrangement to an editor, to make his work known. If he decides to risk publication on his own account, in which he is unlikely to be successful unless he has had previous professional experience, he must depend on the services of the distributors and booksellers. However publication is effected, readers cannot be dispensed with, whether or not philistine and unappreciative.

There is the case of James Joyce's struggle to bring his experimental work to potential readers: here is the supreme example of discrimination exercised both on the grounds of alleged "morality" and "obscurity" of style. It would be unfair to generalise to the effect that every great experimental writer is treated in this way, although the inertia and conservatism of the book world can be a very real albatross around his neck. Henry Miller may also be cited as a writer who has suffered from censorship in countries other than Eire; yet the bulk of his writing is now accepted by most aware critics as a genuine contribution to modern literature. The outrage of yesterday is the commonplace of to-day.

It is unreasonable to demand that publishers should be philanthropists, regardless of staff, rent and taxes, paying the young, struggling writer more than he is worth in the marketplace. (Some publishers, of course, "nurse" early talent in the hope of an ultimate return). Hence a number of modern writers have concluded that since subsidy is good and necessary in certain cases and since it cannot be expected from publishers except in special circumstances, it should be provided by the State, by municipal authorities, by Trade Unions and other organisations. We shall refer later to this point.

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Conditions have changed little for creative talent in the British Isles since 1910 when Rupert Brooke delivered a lecture to the University Fabian Society at Cambridge.² Brooke has suffered much in poetic reputation at the hands of the between-War adulators who mistakenly considered a handful of "patriotic" poems and early death the central facts of his career; the text of this lecture will be doubly welcome if it leads the intelligentsia to re-assess him both as poet and constructive thinker. He shows how an alarmingly great proportion of the writers (and artists of every kind) of the day lived on unearned income; some of them, like Brooke himself, disapproved of the moral basis of that income, but knew that society would not provide a living from artistic work should they, Tolstoy-like, jettison their inheritance. He was concerned chiefly with two problems—firstly, the fate of those whose early talent was given practically no encouragement through relative poverty and, secondly, the necessity of reasonable financial reward for the artist, whatever his social status, who had proved his worth.

A quotation will show that Rupert Brooke really had drawn up a carefully-considered and imaginative blueprint for the encouragement of the arts, that is, of the artists:—

Besides the central State endowment it would be a good thing to have local and special ones. If the numerous universities of Great Britain could be given money to endow creative work, it would be excellent. At present they only endow critical work and knowledge. They would be able to do the other, too, quite admirably. Municipalities might also be encouraged to take steps in that direction. The more progressive of them are ready enough to be the first, driven by those motives of honourable rivalry which already have so finely influenced some of our great cities and districts. With the present growth of local pride, and of universities in large centres, and with the system of County Council scholarships, it should be easy to encourage local endowment. I can imagine Manchester and others being keen enough to get the credit of connection with the next great painter or dramatist.

Brooke was sharp enough to anticipate Joyce's position, for he declared that "our prayers go up night and day" for an artist "monstrously blasphemous and indecent" in the eyes of the good citizenry. He suggested that private bodies would be needed to rescue such a person whom a University or municipality would endeavour to keep outside their august gates. Joyce, financed by friends, and now one of the great

(2) First published in 1946: (Rupert Hart-Davis. 6/-).

influences on the recent literature of several countries, was widely regarded as heretic and reprobate in his native city. U.C.D. or Dublin Corporation, if consulted, would have let him make a living from reciting home-made ballads to "flea-pit" cinema queues.

Now if the writer is badly off in a large, wealthy country like the U.S. and in a still comparatively wealthy country like Britain, both of which have vast publishing industries, what of the writer in small countries with negligible resources? In the case of Ireland, despite official propaganda for the Irish language, most writers, as we know, use English so that they have the possibility of addressing an audience scattered throughout the English-speaking world. But that most obviously does not absolve the Irish nation of responsibility towards her best literary workers: it is surely well-known that the serious poet or novelist can at best only hope to publish an occasional article or the like in the home market. His main bulk of work must attract a London or New York imprint or go unknown. The recent trade difficulties with regard to exporting books and magazines to Britain has made the few good Irish publishers unable to risk publications that require export sales even to pay their way.

What of the writer who expresses himself most freely in Gaelic? Well, in this Ireland he will get plenty of lip-service from the public orators but only a handful of people to buy his work, even assuming it does manage to be printed; and the example of the officially-inspired Gum is no model for Civil Service sponsorship of the arts. In other words the outlook for the writer, whether in Gaelic or English, is indeed bleak, unless he wins the ear of America or Britain or is content to journalise his talent at an average rate of a guinea a thousand words.

However, it is worth-while to look for a moment at the few constructive efforts that have been made for the writer in England; and it is well to remember that the Irish writer has a chance of sharing in some of them. The Arts Council concerned itself with drama and music during the war—it was then known as C.E.M.A., as it still is in the Six Counties—and has continued its efforts in those fields, but has given practically no attention to contemporary literature, except where it impinges on the other arts. An extension of Arts Council interest to include literary work has occasionally been hinted at without result. Perhaps the B.B.C., especially in its Third Programme, provides the best opportunities: "feature" programme scripts and talks are in fair demand, paid for at high rates, though the emphasis is laid on the established

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writer. Among the various literary awards may be mentioned the Atlantic Awards and the prizes given by several publishing houses to promising new writers. One of the most recent developments is the establishment of an Institute of Contemporary Arts, which plans lectures and brochures and exhibitions of all the arts: the founders include Herbert Read and Alex Comfort, both of whom have often fought for the rights of experimental or unusual workers.

But these few awards merely touch the fringe of the problem. Giving the writer an opportunity to do his best work involves other problems right away—problems of education, the attempt to see that poverty will not push the talented boy into a dead-end. Then there are the wider problems connected with raising the general level of appreciation. As J. B. Priestley pointed out in his lecture to a Fabian Society meeting in 1947,³ thirty-seven years after Rupert Brooke's, art is not just the "icing on a cake," but is far more like the "yeast in the dough." Art is not—at least should not be—an exclusive circus to which the very wealthy can filter through iron turnstiles, with the acceptable badge of correct accent and old school tie; nor can the best art only be appreciated by the "brainy" or people with a flair. Art generally—and literature especially, since everyone now can read—is not a luxury but a necessity; everyone who does not share its pleasures and terrors in an age when the human personality is increasingly straight-jacketed and standardised must be the poorer for the lack of them. Without question the writers, given the opportunity to lead, will use that opportunity for the good of their respective communities.

With only a few qualifications one could write of Ireland what Mr. Priestley, in a postscript to his lecture, says of England:—

In my lecture I pointed out that if the State wants plenty of good art, it must create favourable conditions for the artist; and I went on to say that these conditions did not exist in this country now and that I knew of no plans to bring them into existence in the near future. I added that other governments, far worse off than ours, were already doing more for their arts and artists than our government is doing. I could have gone further and declared, with perfect truth, that many artists of different kinds here now find themselves much worse off than ever before and are beginning to wonder if the Labour Party cares a rap whether they live or die.

3. Reprinted by the Turnstile Press. *The Arts Under Socialism.* (1947). 1/-.

The Irish literary tradition was built by men and women mostly of Anglo-Irish origin, usually possessed of considerable means and social prestige; our writers to-day are not in that position of not having to care desperately whether their work brings a reasonable financial return. And no one will seriously argue in 1948, with sentimental complacency, that the best work is done under the threat of insecurity. Writers are not the kind of people to point the pistol at anyone's head or strike for the elimination of "blacklegs" and an increased "rate for the job." Not only do they lack the cohesion needed for a Trade Union organisation, but they write out of the sheer necessity of self-expression and only in a secondary sense for gain. It would be an encouraging sign if a few public men would take up the fight on behalf of writers, painters and musicians, who only ask a modest percentage on the wealth they contribute without stint to the community.

(This is the last article in Robert Greacen's series as resident critic. Our next resident critic will be Padraic Colum).



BOOK REVIEWS

QUENCH THE MOON, by Walter Macken (*Macmillan & Co.* 10/6).

We have enjoyed Walter Macken's plays in Irish and English, and admired in his acting the expression of an unusually energetic personality. This is, I think, his first novel. It is a fine book, rather tough and grim in parts; but compact of imagination. There is no piecing together here of events and incidents, no mere stirring in of jokes, as the housewife adds raisins to the dough. Pervaded by its quiet inevitable humour, the story is a unity. We get a great deal of the lives of many people—the wild splendour of Connemara being about us all the time. Even when Stephen is away in Galway, the images of his native Killaduff are never long absent from his mind.

Martha Riordan "might never have been content to remain if she had not fallen heavily in love with Connemara, with its barrenness, and its strength and cruelty, because there are no half-measures in this place."

Later, her son says to a school friend who is about to be sent off elsewhere: "Won't you miss all this when you go away?" "God, that's a quare one," replies Paddy. "Miss that dirty ould mountain is it, and thim ould streams and a few ould houses that should a been knocked down years ago." *Quot homines tot sententiae.*

Lovely phrases occur, such as 'You'll have to stick to him, come hell or high water.'

There is an unforgettable picture of a funeral across the sands to Ourish Island. "No matter how big the crowd was it always looked very small on that enormous stretch of sand." "...sandy graves, with the golden sands on top and the grey silver sands down below."

We are shown a narrow point of land jutting into the sea, like a crooked finger ever pointing to America.

We enter into the core of giant conflicts of wild man against man, and of puny man against the elements.

The story starts in a kindly atmosphere—and one remembers that 'the Irish have the genius of the heart.' The best of our singers come to mind—easily distinguishable from all others by this quality of heart glowing in the voice. The heart—the giant that conquers self and sex. Freud be damned! The rest of the world's fine singers can give us solemnity and sex

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However, as we move towards the close of this story, the kindly atmosphere is dissipated. The glib amorality of the heroine, among these stern jovial Gaels—amid these lofty heights and distances and glooms—shocked me, for one. The author occasionally gives us glimpses of the outer forms of religious worship; but he never lets us feel that spark, deep in all these people, that leavens the mass: the faith, for which over and over again the Gael has given his life.

Of course, one is aware of a great quality in *QUENCH THE MOON*—the complete absence of prejudice in setting down the story. Indeed, I had no right to call Kathleen the 'heroine,' for Mr. Macken seems to be wholly impersonal about his characters.

" All our pride is but a jest
None are worst and none are best
Powers above in clouds do sit
Mocking our poor apish wit
That so lamely with such state
Their high glory imitate."

And that is the great way—from Dostoievsky down.

FIELD OF THE STRANGER, by Olivia Robertson (*Peter Davis, Ltd., 9/6*).

This is a Book Society Choice. It is conceived much more subjectively than Miss Robertson's first book, 'St. Malachy's Court.' She gave us in the brief story a warm-hearted and deeply perceptive account of real people: the whole was an objective picture of the lives of a section of humanity. In a way, this book is much more *recherché*. The author can write beautifully—her landscapes live for us; but one cannot escape from the conviction that some of the people in it are caricatures. Their strangeness is so exaggerated that they seem unreal. One feels the author's prejudices right through—what she (as a high brow) is scornful of, and what she condescends to admire. Somehow, the best literature, even autobiography, never seems to be subjective. It is a very amusing book—yet it would be infinitely more amusing if the reader had not always to be on the defensive against the patent prejudices of the writer. Of course, there are some grand jokes "... old Grubty Blair says to anyone who asks him to allow a window to be opened: 'Why have a house?'"

When Miss Robertson philosophises she is uniformly interesting, for she has an original mind. She even makes Mr. St. Leger satisfy us that a woman's place is anywhere but in the

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home! The same Mr. St. Leger expresses many wise and witty thoughts. For all that, he is dead. He makes one think of Strindberg's Spook Sonata. For the rest, we get too much ignorant and vulgar conversation throughout the story. Is any human being *only* ignorant, vulgar and pretentious? I think not. The author only lets us see one aspect of these people, so we do not believe in them. And the worst of it is, when people do not appeal to us as compounded of warm pulsating humanity (however beset by errors and deformities)—like ourselves—we do not care what becomes of them.

This is a very clever and entertaining, but somewhat shallow book. However, the author of St. Malachy's Court has shown us that she can do much better when she writes from the heart and forgets to be a very superior person. Miss Robertson is very young, and should yet do great things.

BLANAID SALKELD.

BODING DAY by Ewart Milne (*Frederick Muller, Ltd.*, 7/6).

Among living Irish poets there are indeed few whose work shows the same combination of qualities as that of Ewart Milne. This, of itself, would not be important were it not that Irish poetry, these days, finds itself at the crossroads, with one foot a little more than tentatively turned in the new direction, and the other nostalgically drawing circles in the dust of yesterday's boreen. Mr. Milne is a poet who seems to have passed through these crossroads with little hesitation as to which direction to take. True, though his mind is made up for the new direction, he does not wish to proceed along it too quickly. But this, I think, is so as he can dart back now and again to the crossroads, not merely to have another sight of what he left behind, but also to take stock of those circling there in doubt and gauge the prospects of recruitment.

Of the seventeen poems in this volume only three have a direct relationship with Ireland, and yet these three are among the best half dozen of the lot. Not only that, but their atmosphere permeates the whole book and their content is all-important in any evaluation of Ewart Milne's work. Between them they contain practically the whole of the poet's armoury. *A Song Of Stem And Stone* has the music—the true haunting music that is high poetry all the way; the echoes and associations and acknowledgments, (on this point, can it be more than a coincidence that the title, *A Song Of Stem and Stone*, reminds me of another historic title, *A Tale Of Shem And Shaun?*); and it has the one foot determinedly pressing forward on to new ground, the other dragging just so much

along the old, familiar plains.

The Minstrel Boy adds the quality of forcefulness—a forcefulness gained from the poet's complete mastery of form and image—and a power of incisive thought that sums up situations in sharp, stinging flashes. At the same time, there is still the suggestion of the crossroad stance, the last, 'longing, lingering look behind,'

Take from me the silly ancient dream of an island people,
But leave me my sky, my wild harp singing over me.

And the third poem, *Deirdre And The Poets*, completes the triangle with the full formula of the poet's conclusions and perhaps a hint of the next line of direction. It is this sense of coming development that gives *Boding Day* much of its fascination. Such a quality, added to the range and variety of technique, form and theme—*The Clockwork Nightingale*, *The Cobbler Who Lost His Shoes* (which was first published in these pages), and the title-poem, *Boding Day*, are outstanding examples—makes this volume a notable achievement and places Ewart Milne firmly in the forefront of present-day Irish literature.

LOOK TO THE SUN by Weston McDaniel (*The Beechhurst Press, New York*).

Weston McDaniel was born in Virginia, of Irish parents. His poetry, however, is American in technique, and in theme it is directly descended from the strain of lusty, seething partisanship of the Universal Underdog that has always been conspicuous in American poetry. The characteristics of that strain are a real bigness of mind and broadness of thought that strike out against intolerance in every form and reckon the only certainties of this world to be Nature and True Love. Its first champion to fire popular imagination was Whitman; it followed with Sandburg; and to-day it has given Patchen and Cummings. Ninety per cent., or perhaps more, of the world's poets have, at some time or another, sung under its banners and to be heard solo one must have a great deal of individuality. Mr. McDaniel, I think, fails in this necessity. He has, as his introducer, Alfred Kreymborg, claims for him, 'a steady eye and ear . . .'; he has also the poetic instinct and he is able, when dealing with such themes, to reveal a vital quality—a real bite. These victories are best exemplified in *Dark Violence*, which ends:

Night and the mob
Drag John from his bed,

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Drag him through lanes of hate
Down to the oak
Withering
In the terror of dark.

But his free verse is too monotonous to give out an individual note. The four poets mentioned above have all written poetry about the same things but no one else could have written it the way they did. Mr. McDaniel has not found a voice which is his, and his alone, and it is mainly this that keeps him, as yet, in the chorus. D.M.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

JAMES PLUNKETT: Born Dublin, 1920. Worked as a clerk and occasionally played the viola in the Radio Eireann Orchestra. Is now engaged as secretary in Workers' Union of Ireland. His stories have been published in various magazines including "The Bell," "Irish Bookman," "Writing To-day," etc.

MICHAEL LUCEY: Born Scilly, a village outside Kinsale, in 1926. Served in the Irish Army during the Emergency and is now in the R.A.S.C., stationed at Aldershot. This is his first story to be published.

VALENTINE CLERY: Born Dublin, 1924. Soldiered around the Mediterranean during the war as artilleryman and commando. Since then has worked in London as civil servant and as police clerk. Returned to live in Ireland where he has been experimenting in prose and verse for a year. This is his first story to be published.

REARDEN CONNER: Born Dublin, 1907. Arrived in London in 1924 and began to earn a living as a landscape-gardener. Took up writing for a living in 1934 when his first novel, published a year earlier, was made a Literary Guild selection in the U.S.A. Has since published eight more novels and another is in preparation. He also writes boys' books under the pseudonym of "Peter Malin."

MAURICE DUGGAN: Born in New Zealand, 1922, of Irish parents (father from Mountmellick, Co. Offaly, mother from Rathkeale, Co. Limerick). Has had work published in literary magazines in New Zealand and Australia and has a volume of short stories coming out this year. Says he would like to see Dublin and adds, "Perhaps I shall."

SEAN O' FAOLAIN: Born Cork, 1900. Has an international reputation as a short-story writer and has also written novels, biographies, a play, and verse-translations from the Old Irish.

TERESA DEEVY: Born in Waterford, now living in Dublin. She has written numerous plays which have been produced in Ireland, Great Britain, and America, and have been broadcast in Ireland and Britain. "Katie Roche" was chosen as one of the best plays of 1935-36.

ROBERT GREACEN: Born Derry, 1920. Has contributed poetry and criticism to many Irish and British periodicals and has edited various collections. His latest book of verse, "The Undying Day," was recently published by the Falcon Press.

EWART MILNE: Born Dublin, 1903. Has been a teacher and a sailor before the mast, and now lives in England. He has contributed verse to the leading Irish, British, and American periodicals and has had five collections published.

DONAT O'DONNELL: Born Dublin, 1917. Took degrees at Dublin University in Modern Literature and Modern History and is employed in a branch of the public relations industry. Has contributed to "The Bell," "The Kenyon Review" (U.S.A.) etc., and a book by him on contemporary Catholic novelists is to be published in America next year.

CONSTANCE MADDEN: Born Limerick. Is married, has one son and lives in Cork.

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